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AUTHOR Johnson, Burke; Strodl, Peter
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a sensitizing conceptual scheme for examining interpersonal adaptation in urban classrooms. The construct "interpersonal adaptation" is conceptualized as the interaction of individual/personality factors, interpersonal factors, and social/cultural factors. The model is applied to the urban school. The conceptual scheme asserts that individuals can be viewed as varying on a continuum of change seeking, of being open to change in some areas but not in others. Both formal and informal organizational structures affect school members' adaptability to change. Adaptive school structures are characterized by morphogenesis and facilitate change by providing an open environment in which to explore differences and problems. The intersection of adaptive individuals and an adaptive school culture characterizes the adaptive school and results in a transformational culture. Urban schools represent multicultural microcosms of the community. Creating adaptive classrooms is especially important in the urban schools, for which a change-oriented culture is essential. Two figures illustrate the discussion. (Contains 14 references.) (SLD)

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INTERPERSONAL ADAPTATION IN THE URBAN SCHOOL: DEVELOPMENT AND APPLICATION OF A SENSITIZING CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

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Peter Strodl
Burke S. Johnson

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Burke Johnson, Ph.D.
University of South Alabama
Department of Behavioral Studies and Educational Technology
108 ILB
Mobile, AL 36688
Phone 205-460-6673
Internet: RBJ@ASNUSA.ASN.NET

and

Peter Strodl, Ed.D.
University of South Alabama
Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations
130 ILB
Mobile, AL 36688
Phone 205-460-7141

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This paper presents a sensitizing conceptual scheme for examining interpersonal adaptation in urban classrooms. It as contended that is a need for a bridge from micro-level analyses to macro research. The construct "interpersonal adaptation" is conceptualized as the interaction of individual/personality factors, interpersonal factors, and social/cultural factors. Interpersonal adaptation is likely to be found in adaptive schools, which are defined as schools characterized by morphogenic or change-oriented organizational cultures that are composed of change-oriented individuals. Interpersonal adaptation is, therefore, viewed as more complex than a simple unidimensional psychological trait. It is what may be better labeled an "interactive process variable."

The purposes of this paper are to 1) present a sensitizing conceptual scheme that can be used to examine schools, and 2) apply the model to the urban school. Application of the model should sensitize the reader to multiple dimensions operating in and around schools, faculty, and staffs, and offer some direction for individual and school adaptation.

Educational Significance

Change, as it is experienced by teachers and students in urban schools, is based upon social and cultural diversity. Change can be quite dramatic, sometimes producing resistance and conflict when not dealt with effectively by teachers and/or administrators. Conceptualized as interpersonal-adaptability, people differ in

their ability to adapt to changes within social and interpersonal environments. In addition, situations vary, especially in urban environments, with respect to organizational pressure for adaptation and change (Campbell, 1991; Seif, 1990). Effective schools are composed of adaptive teachers, administrators, and students, and accept numerous value systems and cultures. All of the within and between-school groups (e.g., administrator, teacher, community, student) are interdependent (Cusick, 1992) and must learn to thrive on positive interaction. School cultures need to be adaptive to change, and schools need to help produce community changes as well as react to community changes (James, 1990).

Sensitizing Conceptual Scheme:

The conceptual scheme can be briefly summarized by the following propositions:

1. Individuals can be viewed as varying on a continuum of change-seeking (i.e., adaptive) versus change-avoiding (non-adaptive),

2. An individual may be open or adaptive to change in some of his or her life domains but not in other life domains,

3. Formal and informal organization structures affect school members' adaptiveness to change,

4. Adaptive school cultures are characterized by morphogenesis and facilitate change by providing an open environment in which individuals and groups are encouraged to explore social differences and test new approaches to problem solving

5. The intersection of adaptive individuals and an adaptive school culture characterizes the "adaptive school"

6. The culture of an adaptive school and community is labeled a transformational culture. This involves

> transformational and constituency leadership, widespread empowerment, risk taking, organizational learning, ongoing collaborative community linkages, and continual personal and organizational change and growth.

Individuals typically have opposing tendencies with regard to adaptability to change. Paradoxically, individuals both like and dislike change. Forces for change within individuals include a desire for learning, growth, newness, self-actualization, achievement, innovation, and increased power. Individual level forces preventing change include habit, security needs, fear of the unknown, lack of awareness, and the desire for stability, organization, and predictability (Lawrence, 1969; Morhead and Griffin, 1989). Individuals have different comfort zones for change. In short, individuals are the result of countervailing forces for and against change. Overall, after "averaging" the outcomes of the countervailing forces, individuals can be viewed as varying on a continuum of change-seeking versus change-avoiding.

Individuals may be open to change (i.e., adaptive) in some life domains and relatively closed to change in others (Figure 1). For example, an individual with a relatively stagnant or stable home life may be open to change in the work environment. Similarly, an individual with an active social life may desire stability and constancy in his or her work life. Life domain inconsistencies point out the danger in overinterpretation of individuals' average adaptiveness tendencies. Individuals are complex constructions of varying adaptive tendencies. Examination of these kinds of issues in particular situations with particular subpopulations should be

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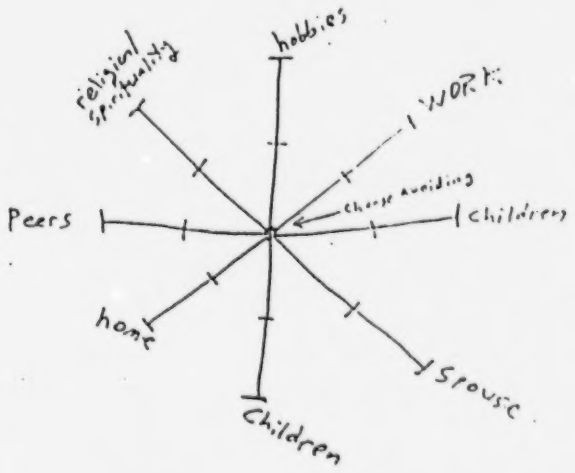
determined empirically. A teacher may ask, for example, what are the adaptive tendencies of his or her students?

Figure 1
Adaptiveness to Change in Life Domains



So far, it is suggested that adaptability to change can be viewed as a personality characteristic and that individuals may be open to change only in some of their life domains. Interpersonal and cultural processes must be considered next. What are the individual personality make-ups of other individuals in schools? What kinds of situations emerge from the interaction of specific personality configurations? And, what kinds of interactions do different school cultures support and facilitate? As we move beyond examination of individual actors in the school, classroom, and community, what kinds of formal and informal groups exert power and influence?, and what is the nature of the school or organizational culture?

In addition to the individual level of analysis in schools are

the conceptual levels of structure, culture, interaction, and social construction of reality. Schools have formal organizational structures that orient behavior through role/status networks (Hoy & Miskel, 1987). A principal, for example, deals with parents, teachers, students, administrators, and community leaders. Structural relations provide some agreed upon behavioral expectations and rules for behavior which provide the behavioral setting. As the Hawthorne studies have shown, however, the importance of informal groups must not be ignored (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939). Within a given school setting, interaction among members of the organization bring the structure to life. Behavior and interpretations emerge from the interactions of individuals and groups, and social constructions of reality result (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Gergen, 1985; Pitre & Sims, 1987). Behavior is motivated by self interests and utilitarian concerns, laws, traditions, norms, negotiations, situational contingencies, and personalities. School leaders, therefore, should be aware of the many potential motivations of school and community members.

School cultures can be characterized as supporting morphogenesis or as supporting homeostasis. Likewise, individuals can be characterized as being supportive of change or supportive of stability. The intersection of individuals with culture produces the school-type likely to emerge in a given situation or time. Figure 2 below shows four hypothesized person/environment links.

Figure 2
General attitude toward change
by individuals in school

School Culture	Likes Change (Adaptive)	Dislikes Change (Non-adaptive)
Morphogenesis (Adaptive)	Adaptive School	Incongruent Person/culture Fit
Homeostasis (Non-adaptive)	Incongruent Person/culture Fit	Bureaucratic/ Stagnant Schools

The school culture is heavily influenced by the principal, but it is also influenced by the history of the school within the community, by state and local laws, by school traditions, customs, and stories, and by informal groups within the organization (Cusick, 1992).

Individuals self-select into a school culture, are socialized or become parts of school cultures, and, importantly, reproduce school cultures. The culture of the adaptive school in Figure 2 is labeled here a "transformational culture." A transformational culture is defined as including transformational and constituency leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Strodl, 1993), widespread empowerment, risk taking, ongoing collaborative linkages between school and community, continual personal and organizational change and growth. Previous definitions of culture have largely ignored the linkage between school and community. A transformational culture is, therefore, a more inclusive form of school culture. It involves an organization characterized by transformational learning

(Lundberg, 1989) dynamically linked into a larger community of people and ideas.

Application of Sensitizing Conceptual Scheme to Urban Schools

More than other institutions, urban schools represent multicultural microcosms of the community. Children from all segments of the community come to the school and act out what their parents have been dealing with over the weekend and overnight. Among large families living in close clan-like proximity, for example, family squabbles are brought to school by students to be reenacted during recess. Neighborhood differences and conflicts are brought to school by the children. Discord sometimes appears in low structure times and areas of schools, such as cafeterias and playgrounds, hallways during class changes, and on the school bus. Stressors that exist in neighborhoods and communities are reflected in the cultural differences among children in the school.

School constituencies include groups of people who cluster together according to neighborhood arrangements, church groups, ethnic groups, cultural and linguistic groups, and social groups. Yet, conflict is likely among groups with dissimilar ways of perceiving school events and activities. Therefore, it is important for teachers in urban classrooms to be conversant and empathetic to multicultural norms and conflicts. Teachers should help create adaptive classrooms that thrive on differences, creating dynamic, changing adaptive classrooms (Strodl, 1993). Constituency leaders in a transformational culture may often bring people with

differences together and facilitate creative change and individual and organizational learning. This should result in a joint construction based on multiple constituency negotiations.

The adaptive classroom is not independent of the larger school and community environments. Schools in diverse, often rapidly changing, urban environments need to move in the direction of the "adaptive school." The adaptive school represents the match of adaptive individuals (e.g., teachers and students) and a change oriented culture. Unfortunately, many schools are currently in the other cells given in Figure 2. Two of the other cells represent incongruencies, and the last cell represents a non-optimal congruency (stagnant schools). Because each cell stands for a unique situation, proposed solutions will vary. The empirical distribution of schools in the cells of Figure 2 is a question that needs to be examined; in addition, debates about where we want to go (i.e., which cell in Figure 2) need to continue.

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